

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Communicable Disease Control

Botulism

(food-borne botulism and infant botulism)

What is botulism?

Botulism is a food poisoning caused by a toxin produced by the bacteria. *Clostridium botulinum*. Only a few cases are reported each decade in Montana. There are two types: (1) Food-borne and (2) Infant. Foodborne is caused by a toxin formed in food contaminate with the bacteria. Infant occurs when the organism multiplies in a babies intestine.

Who gets botulism?

Food-borne botulism is due to ingestion of a toxin formed in food. It often involves improperly processed home-canned foods. Botulism in infants under one year of age has been associated with the ingestion of contaminated honey. Botulism spores are found in all soil across the USA.

How is botulism spread?

Person to person spread does not occur. A person must ingest contaminated food that has not been properly cooked or reheated after the toxin has been produced by the bacteria. With infant botulism, an infant must ingest bacterial spores and then produce the toxin in his/her gastrointestinal tract.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Food-borne and infant botulism produce symptoms that affect the nervous system. The symptoms of food-borne botulism include blurred or double vision, general weakness, poor reflexes, difficulty swallowing and sometimes death. Infant botulism has a wide range of symptoms including difficulty breathing, visual disturbances, poor feeding and poor reflexes.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of food-borne botulism usually appear 12-36 hours after ingestion, but may take several days. The incubation period for infant botulism is unknown.

What is the treatment for botulism?

Hospital care is necessary. Antitoxin is given in certain cases of food-borne botulism, but not in cases of infant botulism.

What happens if botulism is not treated?

Untreated botulism may result in death.

How can botulism be prevented?

Identified sources of infant botulism, such as honey, should not be fed to infants, nor should other products which may be contaminated with soil. All canned and preserved foods should be properly processed and prepared. Bulging containers should not be opened and foods with off-odors should not be eaten or even tasted. Commercial cans with bulging should be returned unopened to the vendor.